

Seeing Drake's Full Life in Perspective

In any major public controversy, there is necessity that all the facts related to the issue are presented by those who are considered true experts, and the facts presented are made clear to all concerned. The recent heated debate about the future of Sir Francis Drake's name being publically displayed in Marin is such an issue. Although I have dedicated many years to the study of the life of Francis Drake, and have publicly offered to put the real story of Drake's young life into perspective, it is now absolutely necessary that we all listen to an unquestioned authority on the subject.

Author Dr. John Sugden ("Sir Francis Drake") is considered by most historians worldwide to be one of the top experts on Francis Drake in England, and the entire world. His book on the subject of Drake is widely accepted to be the most thoroughly researched, in-depth study of his life ever written. You'll find an important article written by Dr. Sugden on my website: sfdrakefoundation.org (his bio is included). The article directly addresses the current controversy surrounding the early life of Sir Francis Drake. The historic information presented by Dr. Sugden clearly shows that Francis Drake's life changed dramatically, in many positive ways, after his two voyages with his cousin, John Hawkins, short-lived slave trade, and that Drake soon after became a major positive force towards the fair and just treatment of both the African and Native American people of his time. It is time for the residents of Marin to begin to understand the full life and many positive actions of Sir Francis Drake as a mature man and to celebrate his memory, not condemn it.

~ Duane Van Dieman, Mill Valley

Below is an op-ed article, contributed the Marin Voice (Marin IJ)



From Historian's Perspective, Drake Should Be Admired

by Duane Van Dieman

Author Dr. John Sugden is considered by most historians worldwide to be the foremost authority on Sir Francis Drake in England.

His book, "Sir Francis Drake", is widely accepted to be the most thoroughly researched study of his life ever written. Sugden's article, "Up From Slavery; Diego and Francis Drake" is available on the Drake Debate page of my website: sfdrakefoundation.org.

In the article, Sugden clearly shows that Drake's life changed dramatically after his two early voyages for John Hawkins', his cousin, as part of Hawkins' slave trade. Soon after, he became a major positive force toward the fair and just treatment of both the African and Native American people. There is no evidence to show that Drake was a slave owner, rapist or "mass murderer" during his life in the 1500s, as some have claimed.

Here are key excerpts from Sugden's article: "He was the nearest the Elizabethans got to a significant champion of these people, and the nearest they got to an abolitionist in his attempts to liberate and sometimes repatriate slaves who came within his power. With the help of a black man known only as Diego, he had seen and understood something of a worldview few Englishman knew".

"In the west Indies, Drake had taken two Spanish ships, and deliberately released their black slaves and set them ashore that they might gain their liberty".

"He was also cultivating the Native American communities, treating them fairly and giving content and satisfaction of the Indians... We have enough evidence to conclude that all those years ago Drake stood up and demanded freedom with respect for Indians and Blacks. Now, perhaps, at this time of introspection is time to stand up for Drake".

Sugden contributed a comment about the current Drake controversy to my website: "The main failing of this type of accusation is its inability to take a developmental view of people's lives. Someone did something when they were relatively young, and are therefore beyond redemption. Drake became a champion of black and Native American peoples, and took to liberating slaves he encountered as a policy. He may have liberated more than a thousand on his 1585-86 voyage. It is rather like condemning Gandhi as a warmonger because he was once a recruiting sergeant for the army, and ignoring what he became afterwards."

"He developed a marked sensitivity to Black and Native American people when precious few other Elizabethans did."

Drake's involvement with Hawkins' was supported by the Queen and lasted for only about two of his over 40 years as a sailor. As a junior officer, Drake had no say in the choosing the ship's contents or destination.

A clash caused by Spanish betrayal at San Juan de Ulua (near Vera Cruz) at the venture's end, caused the deaths or enslavement of hundreds of Drake's shipmates. It brought a great maturity and change of attitude to Drake, as he began a life-long, personal war against Spanish tyranny.

Through subsequent events, Drake would begin to befriend and defend both Black and Native Americans. He received the Drake Jewel from Queen Elizabeth I for uniting with Black supporters against Spain and, uniquely, offered Blacks equal pay for equal work aboard his ships. There were freed Black slaves working as sailors aboard the Golden Hind here in Marin in the summer of 1579.

Importantly, the first time the English language was spoken in what is now the United States was in Marin, in great friendship, by Captain Francis Drake to the Coast Miwok people. During the ship's stay, Drake was made an honorary chief.

While I support our celebrating and learning more about the wonderful Coast Miwok people, the story of this five week, peaceful meeting of the English and Native American people is remarkable, and certainly worthy of our continued countywide recognition and public support.

During his lifetime, Sir Francis Drake became a knight, a master navigator, a world circumnavigator, a leader against Spanish tyranny, a vice admiral, a major defender of England, a great explorer, a mayor of Plymouth, a member of Parliament, and one of the most inspiring and forward thinking men of his era.

Duane Van Dieman is a Marin native who has researched Sir Francis Drake since 2001. He manages the sfdrakefoundation.org website.



The Content of One's Character

Commentary by Duane Van Dieman

Those who have offered angry statements in regard to the legacy of Sir Francis Drake have engaged in passing judgment on his entire life without knowing all the facts. It is called prejudice. This, along with the hatred that prejudice can promote, is exactly what people protesting in the streets is are committed to end. Understanding the true content of one's character is the only road to real understanding and respect. It is also critically important to not let something that happened when a person was in their formative years define their entire life.

I find that, to many, there is either a lack of understanding of Drake's actions towards human equality as a mature man, or the refusal to understand and recognize the power of redemption, which has been the key to success of many great people in world history.

Immediately following his brief apprenticeship aboard his cousin's slave ship, Drake dedicated himself to a lifelong fight against Spanish tyranny and oppression by defending England and battling those who we're enslaving native peoples around the world. Drake became a champion for the freedom of both Blacks and Native Americans and freed thousands of Blacks from Spanish enslavement. He gave equal pay for equal work to freed Blacks who worked aboard his ships and was awarded the Drake Jewel by the Queen for his alliance with Blacks against Spanish enslavement. In terms of promoting human equality, Francis Drake became a true renaissance man of the Elizabethan era.

Condemning the man Drake became as an enemy of the Black man is exactly who *the leader* Sir Francis Drake was not. Again, overcoming prejudice and hatred, caused by not fully understanding one's actions, or the true content of one's character, is largely what the Black Lives Matter Movement is all about.

